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ABSTRACT

The paper presents an alternative service delivery model for special education. Problems with the current delivery model include tests, labeling, overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities, and lack of generalization from the resource setting to the regular classroom. The alternative model would allow more students to be served without being labeled and increase collaboration between general education and special education programs. Change agents are described including California law, current research, and directives from the Federal Government. Collaborative consultation is promoted as an alternative vehicle to facilitate school-site change. The triadic model of collaborative consultation in which a variety of persons may serve as either consultant, mediator, or target is described. Characteristics of successful consultation programs are identified and include administrative support, a sense of shared ownership, a consistent and responsive total school instructional core curriculum, and quality paraprofessionals. (DB)

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CREATING SCHOOL-SITE CHANGE THROUGH COLLABORATIVE CONSULTATION

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EC 210 329

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Abstract

Special Education is frequently called upon to assist in teaching the student who cannot benefit from some portion of the general education program. Yet, special educators as well as general educators recognize that more students need assistance than resources permit. This article promotes the use of an alternative delivery model which (1) examines the legal flexibility that is now available, (2) allows more students to be served without being labeled, and (3) increases collaboration among general education and special education programs.

Change agents are described including California law, current research, and directives from the federal government. Collaborative consultation is promoted as an alternative vehicle to facilitate school-site change.

Abstract: Typically special education is called upon to assist in teaching the student who cannot benefit from some portion of the regular education program. Yet, special educators recognize that more students need assistance than resources permit. This article promotes the use of an alternative delivery model which 1) uses legal flexibility now available, 2) allows more students to be served without being labeled , and 3) increases collaboration among regular education and special education programs. Several change agents are described including California law, current research , and directives from the federal government . The alternative promoted is Collaborative Consultation as a vehicle to facilitate school-site change.

Forces at the national and state level are asking resource specialists to extended their expertise into the regular classroom. Regular education teachers often seek assistance for students who have special needs but may not qualify for such assistance. One rationale for using the expertise of the resource specialist is that low achieving and learning handicapped students have similar needs and consequently can benefit from similar learning strategies (Deschler, 1979).

Schools in California, through legal authority granted in the School-Based Program Coordination Act, Assembly Bill 777, have the legal option to serve non-eligible students in resource specialist programs. To date, few schools have opted to use the latitude granted by this Act (Birdsall, 1983). The use of collaborative consultation as a delivery model can increase the use of this legal option. This article explores a shift in current delivery models to the use of collaborative consultation in order to enhance services to non-eligible students while protecting the rights of the exceptional student .

Problems with Current Delivery Model

Problems with tests, labeling, and overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities are real issues that can be resolved by using the existing legal flexibility permitted in AB777. The findings of a report by the Office for Civil Rights (1982) supports the need to not classify students just so they can receive special education. The council points out that categories (Educable Mentally Retarded, Learning Handicapped) may be more of an administrative convenience than an educational necessity.

The last fifteen years have been a period of great social change, significant legislative actions, and judicial directives. Court cases, most notably Diana v. State Board of Education (1974), Larry P. v. Riles (1972,1987), and state legislation in special education require non-discriminatory testing in an effort to reduce overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in classes for the mentally retarded.

Educational research similarly reports the negative effects of isolating certain students for small group instruction. The benefits of "pulling" students outside of the regular classroom to receive small amounts of individualized instruction are not supported by current research. Deschler (1985) recommends instead that students only be removed when the nature of the severity is such that education in the regular class cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Deschler points out that the majority (89%) of learning handicapped students now served fall within the mild category and should be encouraged to stay in the regular education environment.

Research on the aggregate effects of categorical programs (Rand 1982) found that students miss too much of the regular program and they have a hard time catching up to their peers. Resource specialists favor the pull-out approach because they can work on specific skill deficiencies typically not addressed in the regular classroom. However, little research supports the transition of skills acquired in one setting to the regular classroom. Many student "deficiencies" emerge in the context of the regular classroom and as such should be addressed in that environment.

Change Agents

Current research and law serve as motivators for change or **change agents**. Other change agents prompting new delivery models for special education include:

1) Proposed legislation by the California State Department of Education (1987) to encourage better coordination of programs
2) Legislative recommendations by the Commission on Special Education (1987) to encourage resource specialists performing consultative functions, and

3) Assistant Secretary Madeleine Will (U.S. Department of Education) promoting the regular education initiative aimed at serving special education children within the regular education environment.

Concerns about too much emphasis on assessment rather than services also support the push to change how services are delivered. The **change agents** encourage local instructional staff to spend less time on assessment *and more time on* instructional delivery. Staff currently spend too much time on meeting paperwork requirements generated by testing and assessment procedures. A study on paperwork in Special Education (Barrick & Enell,1980) found that 73% of the special education teachers surveyed said the IEP was more helpful for instruction than was assessment. Teachers typically recognize the importance of documentation and assessment but they dislike the paperwork documentation generates.

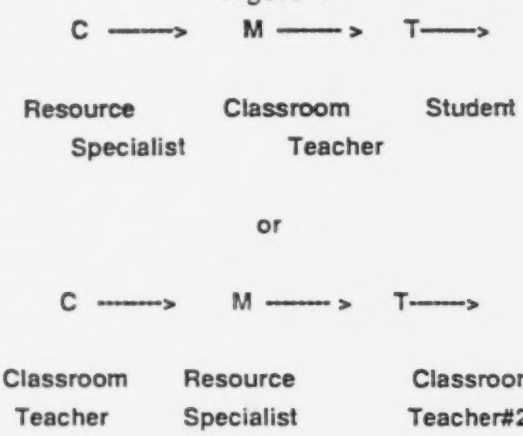
Another change agent is the large number of racial and ethnic minorities who need special education but cannot be accurately identified. In 1985 for example racial and ethnic minority students represented 44% of all special education students served in California. Overrepresentation of black and Hispanics still exists, while under-representation of Asians is a recent dilemma (Pupil Count Data, California State Department of Education, 1985). Local schools need alternatives which assist in serving students without being handcuffed by labeling procedures.

The need for closer collaboration between regular education and special education also motivates change. Special education tends to operate in an isolated fashion at the school site level. The authority to operate the program should rest with the school site administrator even if funding is decided by another administrative level or agency. It is the site administrator's responsibility to ensure that all programs at the site level work together to support one core academic curriculum for **all** students. Collaboration among special educators and other staff strengthens the "early identification" of learning needs.

What is Collaborative Consultation?

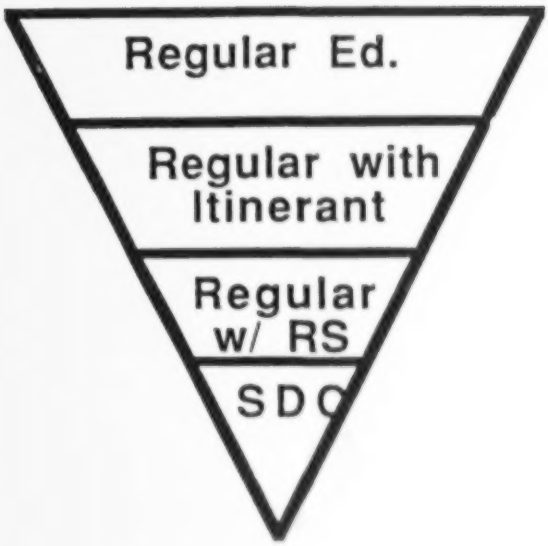
Collaborative consultation is one way to address the concerns raised in this paper. The collaborative consultative model uses the triadic approach which acknowledges the professional worth and expertise of every member of the school community (Tharpe and Wetzel, 1969, Tharpe, 1975). The triadic model (Figure 1) includes a consultant (c), a mediator (m), and a target (t). In most cases, the consultant is the resource specialist who assists the classroom teacher (m) who in turn instructs the student (t). Another option is to have classroom teachers be consultants (c), the resource teacher as mediator (m) and another teacher be the target (t).

Figure 1



At a school site, coordinated services are provided by anyone who has expertise which matches the student's needs. Using a cascade of services (Reynolds, 1962, Deno 1970), students receive services within the regular classroom environment, then receive intensive services only in proportion to the type support they need. Wherever possible, the least restrictive environment is sought rather than "pull-out" or removal from the regular classroom. Collaborative consultation as depicted in Figure 2 illustrates this point.

Figure 2



Collaborative Consultation Services

Unlike the rigidity found in many resource specialist programs, the resource specialist as consultant is able to cross over and provide the appropriate service when needed. This cross-over extends the expertise and knowledge of the resource specialist to be shared with the regular classroom teacher. The spill-over and sharing of expertise ultimately benefits both eligible and non-eligible students alike.

Collaborative consultation still allows individual tutorial assistance but the goal is to deliver such instruction in the least restrictive environment and in an environment where responsibilities are shared equally. Studies have shown that successful collaborative consultation requires administrative support and adequate time for specialists to provide consultation (Idol-Maestas, 1983).

The coordination between regular and special programs occurs when student needs dictate how school resources are used. A **student study team referral** process matches student needs to staff expertise. This problem-solving team identifies student strengths and weaknesses and then develops an intervention plan. Many schools operating school-based coordinated programs use student study teams as a way of identifying students and

developing intervention plans in a timely fashion.

Through collaborative consultation, the skills of staff involved improve as coordination improves. Teachers learn how to deal more effectively with students' learning styles by employing strategies used by special education teachers. Regular classroom teachers are provided consultation services which filters down to the student, thus improving the students ability to function within the regular classroom. Students also receive small group instruction from the specialist as needed but within the regular classroom environment.

Collaborative consultation using the triadic model fosters shared responsibility coupled with active participation on the part of support staff and classroom teachers. The resource specialist, working as a consulting teacher assist more students by assisting the classroom teacher. The advantages of collaborative consultation are:

1) Improved opportunity for demonstration teaching,
2) Increased capacity to serve more students,
3) Increased curriculum coordination,
4) Decreased labeling and stigmatizing,
5) Decreased racial / ethnic segregation using "pull-out" tutorial models, and
6) Increased students interaction among non-handicapped and handicapped.
7) Improved decision-making with increased cooperation

Role of Resource Specialist

The professional role of the resource specialist established by California's Master Plan for Special Education in 1979 states... " provide instruction and services for those pupils whose needs have been identified in the individualized education program" for handicapped students (E.C. 56362.1). According to current law, the main responsibilities of a resource specialist are:

1) Provide instruction and services to handicapped students assigned to the regular classroom for the majority of the school day.
2) Provide information and assistance to handicapped students and their parents.
3) Provide consultation, resource information and material to parents and regular school staff.

4) Coordinate special education services with regular school programs, and
5) Participate in referral, review and revision processes for handicapped pupils (California Master Plan for Special Education, 1979).

The interpretation of the role of the resource specialist has varied depending on local governing board guidelines of current law., Local district's and Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) needs dictate the role of the resource specialist program. A study by Sargent (1981) of thirty randomly selected resource specialists in five states found that the primary responsibility (51%) of selected resource specialists was direct instruction; and that consulting with staff, parents and administrators was a minor duty (12%).
These data show that although consulting is not the primary function of the resource specialist, the specialist does spend a significant amount of time consulting with teachers or training teachers in a collaborative fashion (Evans, 1980).

Using State Law to Aid Implementation

California state law permits the school site the option to coordinate up to eleven state funded categorical programs. The **School-Based Program Coordination Act** requires the school site council, under the direction of the local governing board to develop a plan which specifies how coordination of existing categorical resources will occur. The plan should describe what programs will be coordinated and how services will be guaranteed to identified students for whom the specially funded programs are intended.

The legislative intent of the School-Based Program is to improve how spearately funded programs work together at the school site to meet school-wide needs while still retaining supplementary services to specific targeted student populations. Identification procedures and the supplementary nature of categorical funds remain unchanged. Latitude occurs in how services are coordinated and delivered at the site level. For example special education allows

> "... the resource specialist and designated instruction and services may be provided to pupils who have not been identified as individuals with exceptional needs, provided that all identified individuals with exceptional needs are appropriately served" (E.C. 52860).

This gives the local school site flexibility to serve non-identified students but not

at the expense of students who have exceptional needs. The accountability mechnaism is the IEP for students with exceptional needs. Schools must still provide such services as specified in the IEP. Non-identified students served by the resource specialist are not included in the caseload and as such, does not affect funding in subsequent years.

Concerns About Implementation

Barriers to collaborative consultation arise when site administrators, regular classroom teachers, the parents of regular classroom students, and even special education teachers, perceive the model as a threat to future funding or compliance. Special education advocates fear a loss of funding may arise as students are served in the regular classroom. District's are given latitutude on **how** services are provided and coordination but this does not affect fiscal entitlements. Funding under the School-Based Program Coordination Act is not altered from state to district and from district to school.

Another concern is that increased consultation may mean decreased direct instruction to students who need these services the most. Teachers fear that students with severe learning and behavior problems will go unattended. Yet, collaborative consultation does not stop the referral process for special education. Collaborative consultation encourages the regular education teacher to use teaching methods successful for students with learning or behavior problems. Small group instruction could still continue within the environment of the regular classroom.

Some classroom teachers also resist the specialist coming into the classroom to provide consultative services. In addition, the specialist may= fear the consulting aspect and working within the regular classroom. Teachers as well as specialists need to alleviate concerns associated with working in the same teaching environment. A willing attitude on behalf of all staff concerned is a best way to alleviate such fears.

Resource specialist may feel an increasing discrepancy between their existing competencies and expectations of their new role when serving as a consultant (Aloia, 1983). Studies on consultative roles document the need for new competencies which may not have been included in credentialing programs for the resource specialist. A staff development program can resolve the various concerns about the new job expectations of the resource specialist utilizing the consultative model.

Consultative roles should be part of the continuum of special education

services. Well defined roles of resource specialist is necessary (Idol-Maestas & Ritter, 1985).

Research on the Consultative Model

Many practioners have asked about the research data to support the use of the consultative model. A recent study by West and Idol (1987) summarizes research on the consultative process, including benefits on consultee (teacher), and client (student). A meta-analysis of 54 outcome studies which investigated the outcome variables classified as attidudinal, behavioral and achievement, reported that the average consultation participant was better off than 68% of nonparticipants. It appears that consultants have been successful in changing consultee behavior, but demonstrate only limited success in modifying clients, student achievement in particular.

While the studies on direct change in students have been mixed (Idol-Maestas, 1983, Iscoe et al,. 1967, Schmuck, 1968) there is evidence showing that consultation has improved achievement among students who have disruptive behavior (Ajchenbaum & Reynolds, 1981: Kosier, 1970, Marchant 1972). Another study found improvements in student achievement among students whose teachers had received curriculum consultation (Norton, 1971). Clearly, the research on the effectiveness have yielded some promising data on teacher, student and even system change. However much has yet to be done using adequate research controls which can link the intervention to the change reported.

Implementation Guidelines

Collaborative consultation requires a re-definition of roles, both regular and special. The new approach enables more students with mild problems to be served. The resource specialist serves more students and serves as a collaborator with the regular classroom teacher. Successful programs share a number of characteristics: These are:

1) Administrative Support. Support for collaborative consultation must be strong and visibly enthusiastic thoughout the district. The site administrator must support the concept and convey their support to the school staff.

2) Shared Ownership. One of the most basic components of collaborative consultation is the idea of shared ownership, that a particular student is not a regular education or special education

problem. The student study team process should promote shared ownership of students and early identification of learning difficulties.

3) A consistent and Responsive Total School Instructional Core Curriculum. The core curriculum must be broad enough and flexible so that all types of students benefit. Many schools must avoid diluting the content, pace and standards for low-ability students. Appropriate instructional strategies are a perfered alternative to "tracking".

4) Quality Paraprofessional. Instructional aides become increasingly important as the role of the resource specialist changes from teacher to consultant. The aide will be asked to support and augment the service that the consultant is providing.

Conclusion

There is a need for special education programs to seek alternative delivery models for providing instruction to mildly handicapped students. Ample research and popular opinion support the notion of early identification and servicing without labeling. The agents for change include research, current legislative flexibility, and directives from the U.S. Department of Education. Collaborative consultation is but one solution that promotes school-wide change.

The consultative model advocated is flexible. Few costs are associated with its implementation. Program effectiveness and efficiency has been known to occur in Arizona, as reported by a Project ReTool pilot study sponsored by the Council for Exceptional Children. Quality need not be compromised by serving more students. Collaborative consultation offers a new direction for all types of specialists who in the past served small groups or individuals on a "pullout" basis. This new direction can improve staff relations and ultimately help the entire school community.

About the Authors

Bob MacMillan is an associate professor of special education at the University of the Pacific, Stockton, California. Dr. MacMillan is extensively involved with the design and development of programs to coordinate service. He has served on the Project ReTool advisory committee as well as a trainer for Project ReTool in Arizona and California. MacMillan completed his degree in special education administration at the University of Alabama.

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